

## **Interview Summary**

**Interview:** Petty Officer, Aviation Maintenance Technician (AMT) Gregory Gibbons  
**Time/Date:** December 15, 2004  
**Location:** Air Station Kodiak  
**Present:** Commander Karl Baldessari, Scott Erickson

During the interview, AMT Gibbons provided the following information:

AMT Gibbons reported that he was the flight mechanic/hoist operator on CG6513, stationed aboard the ALEX HALEY. As the Coast Guard's response to the Selendang Ayu unfolded over a period of two days, there were discussions about the use of helicopters to remove the crew. Following the first hoisting performed by CG6020 and CG6021, he was at dinner aboard the ALEX HALEY, when the cutter's helicopter rollout alert tone was sounded. The pilots of CG6513 conferred with him and the helicopter deck crew about the best method to launch. The rollout onto the helideck was accomplished in "challenging conditions." The blades were unfolded, a preflight completed, and the engines were started. In a lull of sea conditions, CG6513 departed the ALEX HALEY.

After takeoff, CG6020 called in bound, and the two helicopter crews conferred about who should do the hoisting. CG6020 took the task and CG6513 came to a hover, about 400 to 500 feet aft of CG6020. AMT Gibbons said that when the rescue basket went down to the deck of the vessel, no crewmembers approached the basket. Eventually CG6020 began hoisting. As he watched, he saw a "monster" wave engulf the entire helicopter (CG6020). CG6020 began to descend, the tail boom hit the vessel, the main rotors hit the vessel, and the helicopter hit the water. He immediately rigged the rescue basket. He said that all CG6513 crewmembers compartmentalized their emotions and moved into hoist from about 150 feet. He saw 5 targets in the water that were blips on the radar. He put the rescue basket down and lifted Lt. Neel. The next hoist brought up AMT Lickfield. He put the basket down to Lt. Watson. Lt. Watson did not get in the basket, but instead swam over to a floating person. AMT Gibbons watched as Lt. Watson slapped the person, trying to get a response, but there appeared to be none. Lt. Watson then got into the basket, and was hoisted.

AMT Gibbons put the basket down again for the next person. He observed the person attempt to reach out with an arm, and he had to "fish" for the person by moving the basket around. A wave broke over the person and the rescue basket, and after wave passed, he saw the person fouled in the rescue cable. The helicopter hovered down to about 100 feet, and he brought up the basket. AMT Gibbons discovered the rescue cable was around the person's neck, and was covered in oil. The basket was brought into the helicopter and the survivor was laid on the floor. The survivor had foam and saliva around his mouth. AMT Gibbons then went back to searching for additional survivors, but was unable to locate any others. The survivor started moving, and had labored breathing. The crew decided

at first to head for the ALEX HALEY, but then decided that Dutch Harbor was a better choice.

The flight to Dutch Harbor was conducted in darkness. The helicopter flew low, through snow squalls. AMT Gibbons said he located his night vision goggles and gave them to Lt. Kornexl who was flying. Upon arrival at Dutch Harbor, the survivors were off-loaded and the helicopter was refueled. The crew knew there were two more people on the Selendang Ayu, and there were 6 missing persons. CG6513 departed Dutch Harbor in zero/zero conditions. The flight back to the vessel was conducted in "horrible weather conditions." When CG6513 arrived back at the vessel, they contacted the rescue swimmer from CG6020 on the radio, who was located near the forward portion of the vessel. They decided to hoist from about 200 feet. The hoisting took about an hour, with numerous aborted hoists conducted in darkness and high wind.

The crew of CG6513 finally accomplished the hoisting after they moved the rescue swimmer and the master of the vessel further aft from the bow. AMT Gibbons said the helicopter was positioned 70 to 80 feet beyond the intended hoisting spot because the rescue basket was sailing aft in the wind. He conned the helicopter back and right, and got the master of the vessel into the basket. The pilot developed momentary vertigo, but AMT Gibbons got the basket into the helicopter. He lowered the basket for the rescue swimmer, and once he got into the basket, AMT Gibbons told the pilot to pull power to climb away from the vessel. He said he noticed that the rescue cable was showing white, meaning it was near its maximum distance. Once the rescue swimmer was in the cabin, the crew conducted two shoreline searches using night vision goggles. They noticed no persons or reflections. The ALEX HALEY inquired about continuing to search, and the crew of CG6513 reported their fuel status was low, and the recovered survivors need to get to dry land. The crew returned to Dutch Harbor.

AMT Gibbons reported that he entered the Coast Guard in January, 2000, and was certified as a flight mechanic in August, 2000. He had been assigned to Kodiak since June, 2003, and was on his third deployment. He said he had flown in HH-65 helicopters for about 500 hours, with about 230 of those hours in Alaska.